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SUBJECT: Indian and Pakistani Consulates Update

¶1. (SBU) Summary: Indian and Pakistani Consulates watch each others' activities carefully in Herat, while reaching out to Heratis in the medical area, in particular. The Indian Consul follows closely the progress of construction of the Indian-funded, 200-240 million dollar, 42-megawatt Salma dam in Cheshti Sharif district. Since Iran boosted its visa fees and tightened up visa issuance, the number of Afghans applying for Indian and Pakistani visas, mainly for medical treatment, has increased. Security of their consulates is a concern for both subcontinent Consuls. End Summary.

¶2. (SBU) Two Consulates eyeing each other: PRT Officer called separately on the Indian and Pakistani Consuls, Niraj Tiwari and Bakhtyar Khan, respectively, in October. The Indian Consulate opened in 2003, while the Pakistani Consulate opened in 1993. Iran and Turkmenistan also have consulates in Herat while the German Embassy maintains a small office. The Pakistani Consul, who served in the Pakistani embassy in Kabul under the communist regime and has dealt with Afghan affairs off and on in Islamabad, is the only Pakistani diplomat in Herat. He has a support staff, of about five compatriots. He speaks Pashto and some Dari. The Indian Consul is relatively new to Afghan issues and does not speak Dari or Pashto but claims to understand some from vocabulary similarities with Hindi/Urdu. He has several vice consuls to assist. Both Consuls made a point of mentioning that their respective countries have consulates in Jalalabad, Kandahar, and Mazar-e Sharif, in addition to Herat, and that their subcontinent neighbor also has consulates in those Afghan cities. Neither Consul has visited his opposite's country.

¶3. (SBU) Indian medical mission: Besides keeping tabs on what the Pakistani consulate is doing, the major activities of the Indian consulate are medical and hydroelectric dam construction. An eight-member Indian medical mission provides free medical assistance, working with Afghan partners. The Indian Consul explained that some Afghan women and their male relatives feel more comfortable coming to Indian doctors, including male doctors, than to Afghans, and so the Indian medical team treats a large number of women. The Pakistani Consul volunteered that the Indian medical team also treats Pakistani consulate staff occasionally.

¶4. (SBU) Salma dam project: The Indian Consulate pays close attention to the Salma dam project, one of India's largest projects in Afghanistan. The dam on the Hari Rud in Chishti Sharif district of Heart province, approximately 35 km west of the provincial

boundary with Ghor, will provide 42 megawatts of electricity when completed. It will also improve flood control and may provide some water for irrigation. The lake behind the dam should back up water for 16 to 17 kilometers. By Indian standards this is a small dam, the Indian Consul stated, but it will provide a significant amount of electricity to Herat and possibly adjacent provinces. Scheduled to cost 200 million dollars, it will probably wind up costing 240 million. About 100 Indian nationals work with a much larger Afghan workforce. Construction has been slowed by the fallout of security problems in Chishti Sharif and Islamic holidays. Little work was accomplished during Ramadan. The Indian Consul does not believe the local security problems are aimed at disrupting dam construction and believes that Ismail Khan, former governor and warlord of Herat, currently Minister of Water and Power, may be playing a helpful role in calming the security situation in the district. However, other interlocutors, without citing any evidence, have speculated that Iran, which may suffer diminished water flow from the Hari Rud, which comprises the northern boundary between Afghanistan and Iran, and which certainly will lose its commanding position (and leverage) as provider of electricity to Herat, is stirring up the pot in Chishti Sharif so that the dam will never be completed. The Indian Consul optimistically predicts Salma dam will be completed sometime in 2009.

15. (SBU) Limited Pakistani activities: The Pakistanis have no such major project in Herat as the Salma dam. In 2007 they offered to build a modern 200-bed hospital in Herat if the local authorities would provide a suitable plot of land. When the local government responded they would assist the Pakistanis in finding the land, which the Pakistanis could purchase, Islamabad decided to offer the hospital to Logar province.

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16. (SBU) Scant PD activity: Neither consulate appears to be very active in promoting Indian or Pakistani culture. Neither has a cultural center. However, the Indian Consul noted many in Herat regularly watch Indian soap operas on TV and consequently have picked up some Hindi. Both Pakistan and India offer some scholarships to citizens of Herat province. There is some social contact between the two consulates, with staff occasionally hosting their opposite numbers for dinner.

17. (SBU) But the visa business is booming: Both Consuls explained that issuing visas to Afghans was a major part of their consulates' work and that business was growing. The Indian Consul estimated his staff issued about 35 to 40 visas to Afghans daily and a few to third country nationals. The Pakistani Consul stated he issued 20 to 25 visas to Afghans daily and, as a matter of policy, would issue visas to any third country national for six months as an insurance policy in case of emergency evacuation. Medical treatment was the major reason cited by both Consuls by Afghans applying for visas. Both Consuls commented that after Iran raised its visa fees (reportedly to 80 Euros) and tightened up visa issuance, more and more Afghans were applying for visas. Comment: Nevertheless, the longest lines for visas by far are still outside the large Iranian Consulate. In addition, a recent agreement between Afghanistan and Iran (see reftel) appears to be aimed at facilitating the visa process, at least for businessmen. End Comment.

18. (SBU) And security a concern: The two consulates are located within a mile of each other in downtown Herat, both on busy thoroughfares. Following the July 7 bombing of the Indian Embassy in Kabul, which killed more than fifty people, the Indian Consulate has improved its physical security and obtained a larger number of local police in front of its entrance. Following a bicycle bomb outside the police kiosk at its street entrance July 31, which injured one Afghan policeman and two civilians, the Pakistani Consulate has also tightened up security. The Indian Consulate is also dealing with the kidnapping Oct 13 of one of its nationals, together with two Afghans, who work for an Italian company providing services to the ISAF Regional Command/West base near the Herat airport. This follows another kidnapping of an Indian worker in Shindand district in 2007, who eventually was released following a probable payment of ransom.

¶9. (SBU) Comment: Neither Pakistan nor India, borders Herat province. One of the chief, if not the chief raison d'tre of each consulate is the other's presence in Herat. The rivalry appears civil with occasional social contact between the two staffs. With its important Salma dam project and active medical mission, the Indian Consulate is the more active, but the Pakistani Consul is the more knowledgeable about Afghans and Afghanistan. Both, however, are looking over their shoulders at the much larger Iranian consulate and influence in Herat.

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